

until he went to prison, he was only in touch with reality through his intelligence. His was the world of artifice, of mental speculation, of wit, and, at its best, of pure fun.

Never did he make such good use of his intelligence as in the work that followed *Dorian Gray*. In 1891 *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*.

A friend had taken Wilde to hear Bernard Shaw speak on Socialism. Wilde, without bothering himself much about economics, sat down and wrote an essay which should have been entitled *The Soul of Man Above Socialism*.

He took Socialism at its face value, assumed it would do all the dirty work necessary to free Man for higher issues than the drudgery of earning an income, and proceeded to sketch the philosophy of undiluted Individualism. This delightful "variation on a theme by" Shaw has outlasted all the sober sociological works of the pioneers and propagandists of that period, and will probably be read when Socialism (as we understand the term) is dead.

"Unique among Wilde's writings," wrote Robert Ross on the only occasion he ever printed a critical estimate of one of his friend's works, "it is no exaggeration to say that *The Soul of Man* is unique in English literature."

Without being in the least desultory, it touches, though ever so lightly, almost every subject on which educated people think when they think at all. And every subject is illuminated by a phrase which haunts the memory."

Wilde spent a large part of the year 1891 in Paris, writing *Salome* in the French language. Sarah Bernhardt was rehearsing it for production at the Palace Theatre, London, when the censor prohibited its performance in public. Thereupon the author declared that he would live in France and become a naturalized Frenchman. Had he carried out his threat, he would have been spared the tragedy that fell upon him three years later, but we should not have had *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It was *Salome* that made Wilde

an international figure, ever since 1901, when it was produced in Berlin, it has held the continental stage and "has run for a longer consecutive period in Germany than any play by any Englishman, not excepting Shakespeare."

Though it shows the influence of Flaubert and Maeterlinck, the play has a power and an atmosphere peculiar to itself. Nevertheless we cannot help feeling grateful to the censor, whose

*Salome** bore nnessj>ected fruit, for it

turned
modern comedy.

Wilde's